On McNamara's Leaving, P. 4

Progress Note

"The need for blood for wounded and ill Americans in Vietnam has risen from an average of 5 pints to 5,000 pints a week in a little over two years, the Army reports... Lt. Col. Frank W. Kiel, of the Army's Office of Intelligence at the Pentagon . . . said that in April 1965 only 8 pints of blood were used for 3 patients among American troops in Vietnam and he added, 'The escalation of the conflict has been matched by an increase to 5,000 to 10,000 transfusions per month in 1967'."

—*Associated Press in* Washington Star, *Nov. 21.*

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Westmoreland's Bloody Folly — On Hill 875

For several weeks it has been hard to tell whether Gen. Westmoreland was acting as a press agent or a military commander. The Battle of Dak To gives one a chance to judge his capacity in either role. It showed that as a press agent, ballyhooing the enemy's decline in Vietnam, he is a flop. Last week's 5-day battle for Hill 875 flooded the U.S. and world press with pictures of grimy, exhausted American wounded clambering down the slopes for aid, and with stories which showed that the enemy, despite all Westmoreland's optimistic reports, had been able to inflict on American troops —crack seasoned paratroopers, at that—the heaviest casualties of the war. The latest figures as this is written are 287 U.S. dead and 1,000 wounded (plus 78 South Vietnamese killed). The 2nd and 4th Battalions of the 173rd Airborne were chewed up. The result has been to make Westmoreland's optimism look very foolish indeed.

Was That Attack Necessary?

From a public relations point of view, the attack on Hill 875 was—to put it mildly—badly timed. From a military view, the question is—was it necessary? There are strange mutterings in Washington. I heard one important newsman say privately, "The commander who ordered that attack should have been court-martialed." I heard a military man with long experience in Southeast Asia say, "The Viets are playing the same tricks on us that they played on the French, and in the very same places." I have neither the military background nor contacts to check all this out.* I have no private sources at the Pentagon. But from the little I have been able to pick up in conversation and reading, this terrible battle for Hill 875 is questionable from a military point of view, as were the predecessor battles in November for Hills 1,338 and 1,416. The month of fighting around Dak To makes one wonder whether Westmoreland is any better as a General than as a public relations man.

The newsmen and the public have been given to understand that these hills were strongpoints dominating passes which lead from Laos and Cambordia into South Vietnam. They were pictured as fortresses whose guns commanded valley roads below them. But I am told these hills are but a few of hundreds in the Anammite chain along the borders and that the elephant grass, the trees and the jungle growth below and around them is so deep that large bodies of military men can be moved through them even by day without being observed. The most striking evidence of this is that some 5,000 men of the 173rd Airborne had been based for several months close to these hills at the very time the enemy moved troops onto them and built their fortifications—and built them strong enough to resist even direct hits from 105-mm. shells. "The situation had been judged so reassuring," Francois Nivolon, one of the most experienced correspondents in Saigon, wrote in *Le Figaro* (Nov. 25-26), "that the 173rd Brigade had been moved out to other theatres in October. Only some light elements were left behind."

The picture I get is that the enemy commanders in the war against the French, as against ourselves, prepared such hilltop fortresses as traps. They can be held by relatively small numbers of troops. To attack such strongpoints must always be costly. The enemy prepares his escape route. He knows he cannot hold such points permanently once their existence becomes known. Our aerial and artillery firepower is too great. He plans to hold on for a few days, impose

(Continued on Page Two)

Voices From Hell

"Reflecting the general frustration at the base [of Hill 875 near Dakto] at the slow and costly course of the fighting, one officer who had volunteered to fly into the perimeter in a helicopter said: 'I don't care any more if I get back to the world, a world too stupid to stay out of war, too stupid to know how to fight it, too stupid to know how to end it'."

—Washington Post *roundup from Dakto, Nov. 22*

"I ain't going to reenlist and I hope they bring all the U.S. boys out . . . 'cause it's not no war over there. It's a tragedy."

—Pfc. John Guinn, falsely reported killed in an Army body mixup, on his return home to Elizabethton, Tenn. Walter Cronkhite's CBS News, *Nov. 24.*

*** How I miss my dear friend, Bernard Fall. He knew the terrain, the tactics and the military intimately. There is no one to take his place and analyze this bloody battle as it should be analyzed. No one else either in journalistic or military circles has his knowledge and independence of mind.**

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Our Generals Seem to Have Learned Nothing from Years of Guerilla War

(Continued from Page One)

maximum casualties on the attacking forces, and then withdraw. In the case of Hill 875, the trap was well-baited. Airborne units moved out in October were hastily flown back for the attack. The 2d Battalion was ambushed on its way to the hill. The 4th Battalion, sent next day to relieve it, was also badly cut up. For two days the remnants were subjected to murderous machine gun, mortar and rocket fire. In such close fighting, aerial strikes are hazardous and one of our own strikes killed 30 men and wounded many others in the 2d battalion. When the hilltop was finally stormed and taken, the enemy had slipped away. They seem to have carried off most of their dead, their wounded and their weapons. The attackers met not even token resistance.

Questions For Westmoreland

Gen. Westmoreland at once called this a victory. "Dak To," he said, "was the beginning of a great defeat for the enemy." It was a victory in that we took the hill. But was the hill worth it? *Le Figaro* Nov. 25 reported from Saigon that U.S. intelligence believes there are dozens, perhaps hundreds of hilltops in the same area which have been fortified and manned by the enemy. The London *Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Saigon wrote (Nov. 24) that the costly "victory" on Hill 875 raised three questions:

"(1)—Considering that the enemy were well-entrenched on higher ground, and that the Americans have ever-ready air power, were infantry attacks of this nature really necessary?

"(2)—Could the hill be considered sufficiently important to sacrifice over 100 American lives for it?

"(3)—Will it be worth controlling a week from now, or will it quickly revert to the status of countless other peaks throughout the Central Highlands, forgotten and unoccupied by either side?"

These are questions someone ought to put to Gen. Westmoreland. He may consider Dak To a victory, but apparently American military on the spot believe that we cannot afford such victories. M. Nivolon in his *Le Figaro* dispatch of Nov. 25-26 says, "In effect, American tactics have been newly modified in the light of what the last few days of combat have taught. The American command, at least for the moment, has no intention of engaging its infantry in new attacks analogous to those of Hill 875." I asked a military man, "If these hills are of no real military importance, why did the U.S. command take the bait and rush so many troops in for the attack?" His answer was "vanity." I don't know how much weight to give that answer but I do know that the enemy succeeded in his purposes. These, as explained by South Vietnam's General-President Nguyen Van Thieu a few days before the battle ended, were to bloody American troops sufficiently to have an impact on American public opinion and to draw troops away from the delta and the coastal plain (where the rice is now being harvested) into the empty highlands. The enemy succeeded. Whose, then, was the victory?

Gen. Westmoreland seems to be operating on the simple minded theory that he is waging a war of attrition. But storming fortified enemy hilltops is attrition in reverse—decimating some of our own best combat troops. Among the half million U.S. troops and the 600,000 South Vietnamese troops, real combat soldiers are in short supply. Even this minor engagement was a drain upon them. "The First Cavalry Division," said the *New York Times* summary of the battle in its Sunday review of the news Nov. 26, "which only a month ago had three brigades in Binh Dinh [where it had been "pacifying" the locals—IFS] now has only one. That's barely enough to guard its landing zones and base areas." So the area is wide open to guerrilla attack.

This is the way Gen. Giap fought the war against the French, keeping them on a whipsaw. If they dispersed their troops for "pacification", his regulars would launch or threaten an attack on a poorly manned outpost (like Dak To) and draw the French into an ambush and/or a costly hilltop assault. When the French concentrated troops to hit Giap's regulars, his guerrillas would attack in the ill-defended countryside, as has been happening all over South Vietnam in the days which followed our occupation of that empty hilltop. Gen. Giap only attacked where he had local superiority and withdrew when that superiority was threatened, as his troops and the guerrillas are doing today. He has the U.S. spread thin as he had the French spread thin, and he seems to have our Generals making the same mistakes as the French and issuing the same silly optimistic statements. If Westmoreland couldn't judge the situation around Dak To better than that after four years in South Vietnam, we need a new commanding General.

Conventional Military Minds At Work

Dak To, Vietnam—"If this were conventional warfare, this hill would have strategic value. It commands that valley . . . No, it isn't conventional warfare. So that valley doesn't have any strategic value. Neither does the hill." So said a weary American infantry officer standing atop the charred, rubble-strewn summit of Hill 875, a hump of jungle on which 102 U.S. soldiers died.

—Peter R. Kann in the Wall St. Journal, *Nov. 28*

Why UN Observers Fear Senate Passage of the Mansfield Resolution on Vietnam

"The prospect that Washington will decide once again to bring the Vietnam issue to the attention of the Security Council is causing some concern in UN circles. Observers do not believe that a debate at this time will advance the cause of peace in Vietnam since no meaningful resolution can hope to get the votes required for acceptance.

"The alternatives, in the opinion of experienced observers, are a decision so vague in content that it will only add confusion to an already confused issue—or one that will be tabled for the sole purpose of showing the 'doves' that a solution for Vietnam does not lie with the UN.

" 'President Johnson,' a skeptical Western diplomat commented, 'is quite capable of welcoming a U.S. defeat in the UN in order to silence the doves and support the further increase in military pressure the hawks demand."

—Mario Rossi from the UN in The Christian Science Monitor, *Nov. 25.*

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Three Leading Senators Declare Optimism Unjustified and Stress NLF Strength

It was an index of how deeply disturbed Senators are about the optimism being orchestrated by the White House on Vietnam that the Administration's own majority leader, Mansfield, and the senior Republican Senator, Aiken of Vermont, both made Senate speeches Nov. 20 to disagree and to stress the strength of the NLF. Two days later Gore of Tennessee made a similar speech (see box below). Of particular importance were the hints in Aiken's speech that Johnson may be preparing for a crackdown at home next year. Here are the key passages in the Mansfield and Aiken speeches:

"The National Liberation Front [Mansfield said] is the dominant force in South Vietnam, with a total of main forces and paramilitary forces numbering in excess of a quarter million men. This, of course, is exclusive of the some 50,000 North Vietnamese regulars, out of a total of 470,000 men in the North Vietnam Army, who are now located in South Vietnam.

No Sign Viet Cong Weakening

"In my opinion there is very little, if anything, in the pattern of combat operations to indicate any weakening of the ability of the Vietcong to keep on fighting. [Italics added.] They are in no position to and cannot prevent the steady consolidation of American forces along the coast and among the major cities, but they still control the Mekong Delta . . .

"It would be well to consider that our original intent in relation to South Vietnam was to maintain its integrity and its independence. I would assume that in that context all the people of South Vietnam would be included . . . While the morale of the South Vietnamese government may have been restored [by the bombing of the North] the factor of the morale of the people of South Vietnam is another matter . . .

"In line with our original commitment, it would be well to consolidate and concentrate in South Vietnam itself and for the Saigon government to try to establish contact with the National Liberation Front. In this manner, all of the Vietnamese who live in South Vietnam will be represented. Perhaps among themselves they can come up with a solution . . .

"In relation to South Vietnam, the Mekong Delta, which is the stronghold of the NLF and the Vietcong, has hardly been touched. In that area lie 80% of the farmland and around 7 million or approximately one-half of the population of South Vietnam. The Vietcong has an extensive organization there and is, for many of the people who inhabit the area, the sole Vietnamese government they have ever known, trusted, or feared . . .

Bunker Admits NLF's Strength (Privately)

On NBC's Today show Nov. 23 I was asked whether heretical Washington reporters like myself were invited to private press briefings. I replied that I wasn't and that it was an advantage, since much of what one is told is untrue. What is true one is bound—as "off the record"—not to print. I gave an example. Amsassador Bunker at private briefings has been giving a more sober view of the situation in Vietnam than his optimistic public statements. When asked why we could not deal with the NLF, he answered that the NLF was the only cohesive political force in South Vietnam! If this is so what happens to the public propaganda line that the war is only an invasion from the North, that we have a popularly based government in the South, and that the enemy is demoralized and on the run? To be told such things in private yet not allowed to print them is to be drawn into a conspiracy of silence, to be made "one of the gang" or Establishment.

"Gen. Westmoreland . . . said that we may hope for improvement [Aiken declared] . . . in two years. I personally believe he is optimistic. The Senator from Montana [Mansfield] has been referring to the situation in the Delta, which our administration would rather not talk about . . . but it is apparent to all of us that the Delta is an extremely important part of South Vietnam. South Vietnam is now run in Saigon officially by a government which was supported by 35% of the voters and the U.S. government. I would hardly call that a majority rule. But what concerns me most is that while we are focusing attention in Southeast Asia, we are really neglecting the situation here at home, and I believe it is in the United States that our greatest danger of totalitarianism, whether from the right or the left, lies.

"I hope that the Administration will face up to the situation, which they have not done so far. We hear rumors. We hear rumors of a very substantial increase in the number of our Armed Forces next year. So far as I know they are merely rumors; but if there is such an increase, is this increase to be used in Asia? Is it to be used in the U.S., guarding the polls . . .?

"We also hear rumors that the Administration may request some rather drastic rules and regulations which go with the conduct of a major war here in the U.S., some time within the coming year . . . May I say again, let us not forget that the real danger to our democratic institutions lies in the U.S. and not 10,000 miles away."

What The U.S. Really Fears Is The Self-Determination We Claim To Be Defending

"Mr. President, a few days ago President Johnson held a press conference in which, in response to a question, he said the United States is resisting aggression in South Vietnam. The day before, I believe, I was in communication with a high administration official. I inquired as to what is the organized military strength of the North Vietnamese military now in South Vietnam. The answer was 55,000 troops. I asked him if the United States of America did not have approximately 500,000 troops there. That was affirmed.

"I asked: Under what circumstances could we have peace there, in light of this aggression which we are resisting? His answer was that if North Vietnam would withdraw its troops then there can be peace.

"I asked a second question: If North Vietnam would withdraw her 55,000 troops, would the United States withdraw her 500,000 troops, and permit self-determination by the South Vietnamese. The answer was equivocal.

"I asked: If North Vietnam would withdraw her 55,000 troops, what portion of our 500,000 troops, or thereabouts, would we withdraw? Again, the answer was equivocal.

"So, Mr. President, if 500,000 troops, with the great mobility we have, with our air power, with the overwhelming firepower we have, cannot in some way deal with 55,000 less-equipped, less-mobile troops, then there must be some other element present. There is. That other element is the civil-war element.

—Gore in the Senate, Nov. 22

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What Counts Is His Public Record on Vietnam, Not His Private Misgivings

McNamara Put Decorum Ahead of Decency By Going Out in Silence

I do not believe any newspaperman is going to be able really to dig out the story of what Robert McNamara did at the Pentagon. The issues involved in the management of the war machine are too complicated, the inner relationships —institutional and personal—too well hidden from view. But I am inclined to think that this does not really matter because I believe that McNamara's impact is overrated. He and his whiz kids may have house-broken the monster a little, forced it to keep its nose clean in public, saved it from making a worse spectacle of itself, but it remains a monster. They put a little computer cosmetic on it. That's all. McNamara may have made it a little less costly to keep than would have otherwise been true—though the present $80-billions plus is hardly a model of economy.

His One Chance to Purge Himself

Liberal establishment types—academic and journalistic—are quite sentimental about McNamara. Privately, he is supposed to have been a dove. There have even been rumors around for a year or so that he might resign in protest against the war. I am quite willing to believe that McNamara is a civilized and sensitive man. But if so he owed it to himself and to the country to do something better than remain in the Johnson official family, to let himself be quietly kicked downstairs from Secretary of Defense to head of the World Bank. It is said that he declared many months ago that he would never "go out in a huff". All this means that he puts gentlemanly decorum ahead of human decency—for much of the blood being shed in Vietnam is on his hands, whatever the qualms he may have expressed in private. It has been McNamara's war as much as Johnson's war and Kennedy's war. He could have purged himself in public. He deserves no credit for what he may whisper in private.

I do not doubt McNamara's great ability. His statement to the Stennis committee last August on why the bombing of North Vietnam was fruitless was masterly. Within the limits of the official line, he said things which undermined the whole mythology of the war. It is a pity it was not delivered before a different committee, where its implications could have been fully developed. It is hard to see how McNamara could support the war and say the things he did in that statement, but it is possible that he does still cling to the Kennedy era notion that a combination of military force and "pacification" could do the job. Unfortunately Green Berets and feeble little attempts at social reform proved their bankruptcy under Kennedy. The truth is that we have no right to be in Vietnam at all, and that our presence has only made its tangled problems more insoluble. The slow destruction of the country under Johnson is the logical result of the boy scout buttinskyism which began under McNamara and Kennedy.

Worse certainly lies ahead. I believe McNamara's going signals escalation. He could help mobilize the country against it by speaking out. He is silent instead.

LBJ'S Big Red Plot

"Shortly after the peace march on the Pentagon last month, President Johnson met with Republican leaders of the House and read to them a secret report asserting the march was organized by international communism. This was disclosed yesterday by House Republican leader Gerald Ford in a House speech. Ford urged the President to make 'a full report to the American people . . .' The White House news office in Texas had no comment on Ford's remarks . . . Cliff Sessions, director of public information for the Justice Department, was asked what evidence the Administration had to show the march was planned in Hanoi. 'The answer to that is none,' he said . . .

"Ford asked the President at the unusual White House session for Republicans, 'Why are you sitting on this?' He immediately urged Mr. Johnson to make the information public. Later Ford requested a copy of the report for himself. On Oct. 26, five days after the march, Ford received a memo from Walt W. Rostow, the President's national security assistant, who had attended the President's meeting. The memo was based entirely on monitored broadcasts from Hanoi, voicing support for peace demonstrations in the U.S."

—Andrew J. Glass in the Washington Post, *Nov. 23 (with a hat's off from us for his story).*

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